

CROSSROADS

An interdisciplinary journal for the study
of history, philosophy, religion and classics

VOLUME I ISSUE I 2006

ISSN: 1833-878X

Pages 61-71

Victoria Yareham

The One and Many Vedic Dawns in Poetic Translation

ABSTRACT

This paper examines two issues concerning the *Ṛgveda*, the oldest text of the Indian religious tradition. The first addresses the problem of translating ancient religious poetry into English with an underlying desire to find a balance between maintaining philological accuracy and conveying some of the poetic quality of the original. Two hymns, RV 4.51-52, are used to example how such a balance may be struck, with the resultant translations retaining the syllable-count of the original Vedic metre, but not its rhythmical element. The second issue examined in the paper relates to the contents of these two hymns that are dedicated to the Dawn goddess Uṣas, with RV 4.51 invoking only her plural form and RV 4.52 only the singular. The clear demarcation made between the one and many Dawns in these two hymns is unusual, as elsewhere in the *Ṛgveda*, the singular and plural occur in adjacent verses. Hence, a close examination of these two hymns provides the opportunity to elucidate the differing natures of the singular and plural Dawns.

BIOGRAPHY

Victoria Yareham is an honours student in the School of History, Philosophy, Religion, and Classics at the University of Queensland. Her research interests lie specifically within the *Ṛgveda* and its mythology, as well as the translation of Sanskrit and Pali texts.

THE ONE AND MANY VEDIC DAWNS IN POETIC TRANSLATION

ON TRANSLATING ANCIENT POETRY

Ancient poetic literature is commonly translated into a prosaic format when intended for a scholarly audience.ⁱ As scholars grapple with the process of translating an archaic language with all its obscurities, they aim to convey an accurate sense of the source text by principally drawing from the grammatical forms and meanings of words, as well as from philology. Any worth given to the literary style of the original poetry is often dwarfed by the imperative need to express the verbal meaning in a readable manner. Yet the significance of any literary piece extends far beyond merely reducing its contents into components of individual words or phrases. The freedom inherent in the poetic art of any language provides a great capacity for creative expression that is somewhat unattainable in the linguistic structure of prose. Consequently, poetic translations more readily than prose are able to preserve the syntax and stylistic features of the source text, and in the process, employ less interpolation. A successful scholarly translation is thus twofold. It requires the accurate interpretation of a text—a most complex task as the semantic fields and syntactic structures of any two languages are always different—but it must also convey as much of the original literary style as possible, so as to retain verbal precision and textual lucidity. A fine thus balance lies between being faithful to both content and style, whereupon the translator treads carefully in attempting to synthesise these two important criteria.

Chanted in accompaniment to various rituals and sacrifices, the poetic hymns of the *R̥gveda*, the oldest Indic text, praise and invoke an array of Vedic deities.ⁱⁱ Regrettably, the only two complete English translations of this Vedic Sanskrit text by Wilson and Griffith date from the late 19th century and are now hopelessly outdated. More than one hundred years of academic development has notably improved our knowledge of the Vedic period, and this, coupled with the evolved usage of written English, highlights the imperative need for a new translation. In his prosaic rendering of the text, Wilson solely and indiscriminately relies upon the traditional Indian commentator Sāyana (c. 14th century C.E.). In contrast, Griffith, in his poetic approach that largely retains the syllabic-metre of the original, tends to ignore the commentator and consistently deviates from the source text with overly liberal interpretations. Scholars readily accept the importance of Sāyana's commentary provided it is used with a discerning eye, as even Wilson himself acknowledged that some of the commentator's interpretations are obscure and meaningless. To date, the most noteworthy scholarly translations of the *R̥gveda*, Geldner (1951) into German and Renou (1955–1969) incompletely into French, have employed prose, although more recently, free verse was adopted in Elizarenkova's translation into Russian (1989–1999). The problem with these prosaic translations is that they fail to preserve the metrical form and various stylistic features of the *R̥gveda*, and rather liberally insert simple particles or words, such as 'and', 'who' and the copula, in an attempt to increase clarity and readability. At a minimum, such interpolation disturbs the original style, but sometimes, can quite dramatically change the overall purport of the verse.

Perhaps the most experimentative translator of the *R̥gveda* has been Macdonell, whose death in 1930 prevented his finishing a complete English edition. His first publication of translations, *A Vedic Reader for Students*, aims to be very literal affair, without regard to the poetic style, in order to best aid the student. A later selection of his hymns, while forgoing a certain level of verbal accuracy for the sake of readability, goes to great lengths to retain the prescribed Vedic metre, incorporating both the correct number of syllables in each *pāda* (verse-line), as well as the short and long rhythms.ⁱⁱⁱ Published posthumously from the notes to his planned complete edition, his final series of hymns dedicated to Uṣas (the Dawn goddess) are particularly germane to subsequent translations of RV 4.51–52, two of the said Uṣas hymns.^{iv} In this later work, Macdonell achieves a fine balance between maintaining a literal, grammatically precise translation, and preserving some of the original poetic style by conforming to the syllabic measure of each *pāda*, but not to the rhythm.

Without initially intending to do so, the following translations of the two Uṣas hymns RV 4.51–52 adopt the same type of poetic approach as Macdonell's final selection of hymns. By means of sparse interpolation (shown within parenthesis), these translations attempt to employ the minimum vocabulary necessary to construct a meaningful composition, which in turn replicates the concise style of the original Sanskrit. Conforming to the syllabic structure also helps to convey the austere beauty and symmetry of the poetic language, the result of which contrasts starkly to an unstructured, wordy translation in prose.

The twenty *Ṛgvedic* hymns dedicated to the illustrious, shining goddess Uṣas are described by Muir as ‘among the most beautiful—if not the most beautiful—in the entire collection’.^v One intriguing enigma concerning Uṣas is her mention in the plural form approximately 30 percent of the time throughout the *Ṛgveda* and 22 percent specifically within the Uṣas hymns; often, adjacent verses of singular and plural instances are found. The pluralisation of deities is not typical in the *Ṛgveda*, although a few other singular deities display this feature less frequently.^{vi} Composed by Vāmadeva, RV 4.51–52 are particularly unusual amongst the Uṣas hymns because the poet intentionally differentiates between the one and many Dawns, with the former hymn invoking only her plural form and the latter only the singular. A comprehensive study of these two hymns gives a glimpse into the differing natures of the singular and plural Dawns, with additional word-play effects employed deliberately by Vāmadeva further hinting at their distinct identities.^{vii} Accompanying both translation are extensive notes, which summarise and occasionally challenge the traditional commentary of Sāyaṇa and modern scholarship on *Ṛgvedic* exegesis. Abbreviations used for the main exegetical sources are as follows:

BöWb	Otto von Böhtlingk and Rudolf von Roth, <i>Sanskrit-Wörterbuch</i> (St. Petersburg: Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1855–1875; reprint, Osnabruck: Zeller; Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1966)
Geldner, RV	Karl Friedrich Geldner, trans., <i>Der Rig Veda: aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche übersetzt und mit einem laufenden Kommentar versehen</i> , 4 vols. (1951–1957; reprint, 4 vols. in 1, Harvard Oriental Series, ed. M. Witzel, vol. 63, Cambridge, Mass.: The Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, 2003)
Gonda, Epi.	J. Gonda, <i>Epithets in the Ṛgveda</i> , Disputationes Rheno-Trajectinae, IV (The Hague: Mouton, 1959)
Graßmann, Wb. RV	Hermann Graßmann, <i>Wörterbuch Zum Rig-Veda</i> (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1873)
Griffith, RV	Ralph T.H. Griffith, trans., <i>The Hymns of the Ṛgveda: Translated with a Popular Commentary</i> , ed. J.L. Shastri, rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1973)
Macdonell, RV	Arthur Anthony Macdonell, trans., “The Uṣas Hymns of the Ṛgveda”, <i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i> (1932): 345–371.
MW	Monier Monier-Williams, <i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages</i> , New ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002)
Renou, RV	Louis Renou, trans., “Les hymnes à l’Aurore du <i>Ṛgveda</i> ”, in <i>Études Védiques et Pāṇinéennes</i> , Publications de l’institut de civilisation indienne, série in-8, fasc. 4 (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1957): 1–104
RV	<i>Ṛgveda</i>
S	Sāyaṇa from F. Max Müller, ed., <i>Rig-Veda-Samhitā: the Sacred Hymns of the Brāhmins together with the Commentary of Sāyanāchārya</i> , 2d ed., vol. 2 (Varanasi: Krishnadas Academy, 1983)
Wilson, RV	H. H. Wilson, trans., <i>Rig-Veda-Sanhita: A Collection of Ancient Hindu Hymns of the Rig-Veda</i> , vol. 3 (1850–1888; reprint, Poona: Ashtekar & co., 1926)

TRANSLATION OF RV 4.51

(Triṣṭubh Metre, 4 x 11 syllables)

1. Here that well-known light, oft-recurring eastward,
Has from out of the darkness arisen clear.
Just now—gleaming far—the daughters of the sky,
The Dawns make visible the way to people.

2. Vivid Dawns also have arisen eastward,
Like wooden posts set up in sacrifices;
Dual doors of darkness, [like those] of the stall,

The shining, lucent, pure ones have forced open.

3. [Their] shining today inspires the generous
To impart offerings—the bounteous Dawns!
The misers immersed in gloom—let them sleep on—
Awakening not in the midst of darkness.

4. O Dawn goddesses! Would that ancient pathway
Or a new one have belonged to you today,
By which, rich ones, on Navagva, Aṅgira,
Daśagva, Saptāsya you illumed riches?

5. For you, goddesses, by properly yoked steeds
Around the creatures travel each single day,
Arousing, O Dawns, the dozing two-footed,
The four-footed, all life to propel itself.

6. Please! Where [is she] who among these is ancient,
By whom the Ṛbhus' tasks have emanated?
When beautiful Dawns move to adorn themselves,
Like, unageing – never are they known apart.

7. They alone have been those beaming Dawns of old
—[With] superior shine, born true from order—
To whom he having sacrificed, toiled with hymns,
Exalting, chanting, has treasure each day gained.

8. Eastward: they are advancing altogether,
Diffused from the selfsame source altogether.
Goddesses rousing from the place of order,
Like the cows gushing forth, nearer the Dawns draw.

9. Just now [are] those ones altogether combined;
With undiminished hue, the Dawns are moving,
Sweeping the black void away with luminous
Bodies—so light-coloured, so bright, so glowing.

10. A wealth in offspring, O daughters of the sky,
Bestow on us [by] shining, O goddesses!
Waking you all from a comfortable couch,
We should be leaders of a heroic troop.

11. That I beg you for, O daughters of the sky,
O Dawns, shining as sacrifice's banner.
We should be eminent among the people—
That may the Sky and the Earth goddess confer.

NOTES TO RV 4.51

1a. *idám ... tyát*: 'here that well-known (one)' follows Wackernagel who argues that due to *tyá-* operating within the sphere of spoken language in the sense of 'jener bekannte', the pronoun *ayám-* in the same case may easily precede it.^{viii}

tyát: the pronoun describes *jyótis-* 'light' here and *jánī-* 'maid', an attribute of Dawn at RV 4.52.1a.

purutámam: 'oft-recurring' is based on Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) 'oft wiederkehrend' and MW (s.v.) 'frequent, ever-recurring'. Griffith (RV, p.232) and Macdonell (RV, p.360) literally translate the word with its superlative suffix as 'most abundant'. Noting the inadequacy of Griffith and Macdonell's translation, Renou (RV, p.64) comments upon the semi-ordinal quality of *purutáma-* as meaning 'éminente entre beaucoup, entre *pūrvīṭh*'. Gonda, doubtful as to whether the word denotes the dawn of every day or of the New Year alone, suggests translating the disputed word as 'the last of many'.^{ix}

Geldner (RV, p.482) differs considerably with ‘zum vielten Male’. The attribute *purutāma-* refers to *jyōtis-* here and to Dawn indirectly through the pronoun *eṣā* at RV 1.124.6a, a connection that should be noted.

1b. *jyōtiḥ ... tāmasaḥ*: ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ are often mentioned together in diametric opposition; cf. RV 4.52.6b *jyōtiṣā tāmaḥ*.

vayúnāvat: ‘clear’ is based on Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) ‘hell’ and BöWb (s.v.) ‘hell, klar’; the only other RV instance, in the variant form *vayúnavat-*, describes the transformation of *tāmas-* ‘darkness’: *sá ít támo ‘vayunām tatanvát / sūryeṇā vayúnavac cakāra* ‘The unclear darkness, extending far, [Indra] has made clear with the sun’ (RV 6.21.3ab). Translators of RV 4.51.1b do not consider that the attribute elsewhere qualifies *tāmas-*: Renou (RV, pp.71–72) translates the word as ‘portent les signes démarcateurs’, and also mentions that the Indian commentarial tradition understood it as ‘qui rend les choses claires’ with an underlying notion of knowledge, as seen by the comments of S *prakṛṣṭakāntimat*, *prajñānāma*, *prajñopetaṃ*, and *prajñāpakam*; Macdonell (RV, p.360) follows the traditional exegesis with ‘that makes things clear’; Griffith (RV, p.232) chooses ‘splendid’ with its luminous associations; Geldner (RV, p.482) diverges significantly, ‘die Zeiten machend’.

1c. *nūnām*: the additional word ‘just’ strengthens ‘now’ to pose a greater distinction between the verbs *asthāt* and *kṛṇavan*.

divó duhitāraḥ: ‘daughter of the sky’ is an important epithet of Uṣas found only three times in the plural (RV 4.51.1c, 10a, 11a) out of a total of 38 references; for a discussion on the epithet, see Renou (RV, p.15) and Gonda (Epi. pp.96–97).

1d. *kṛṇavan*: 3rd person subjunctive is used in the future sense of ‘will’, see Macdonell.^x

2a. *u*: ‘also’; in this instance, the enclitic particle acts anaphorically to join sentences when word(s) are repeated, such as the root aorists from *sthā-* and indeclinable *purástāt* found here and in v.1ab, see Macdonell.^{xi} This repeated vocabulary in vv.1–2 shows that first the well-known light arises in the east, followed by the vivid Dawns.

2b. *sváravaḥ*: this ritualistic term refers specifically to the wooden posts used in sacrificial rites, MW (s.v.).

2c. *vrajāsya tāmaso dvārā*: the interpretation of this simile as ‘dual doors of darkness, [like those] of the stall’ depends on RV 1.92.4d: *gāvo ná vrajām vyūṣā āvar tāmaḥ* ‘Dawn has disclosed darkness, like cows [do] the stall’.

dvārā: the only other reference to Dawn(s) opening two doors concerns those of the sky: *vī dvārāvṛṇāvo diváh* (RV 1.48.15b).

3c. *acitré*: ‘gloom’, signifying ‘an infinite degree of darkness or obscurity’^{xii}, emphasises the misers’ state; Renou (RV, p.73) remarks, ‘ceci équivaut aux ténèbres éternelles’. The opposition between *acitré* here and the epithet *citrāḥ* ‘vivid’ at v.2a confirms that the former is absent of Dawns and their brightness.

paṇáyah: the word *paṇí-* has a double meaning, signifying both human misers and the mythological demons known as the Paṇis. According to the Vala myth, the Paṇis enclose the Dawn(s), cows, light, and waters in a dark cave, which in turn prevents the morning dawn from shining as seen in the wintry reduction of daylight. The ungenerous worshippers may be interpreted as human manifestations of the Paṇis, because through their lack of worship they similarly perpetuate a state of darkness, not benefiting from Dawn’s luminosity. A similar parallel may be drawn between the poets in this hymn, whose praise encourages the Dawns to shine, and the ancient *ṛṣis* ‘seers’ in the Vala myth, whose singing released the luminous treasures from the cave.

4b. *yāmāḥ*: ‘pathway’ connects to *gātúm* ‘way’ (v.1d) through the anaphoric pronoun *sāḥ*. As a result, the translation resembles Geldner (RV, p.482) ‘Fahrt’, Macdonell (RV, p.360) ‘course’, and Renou (RV, p.71) ‘voyage’, rather than Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) ‘Wagen’, Griffith (RV, p.232) and Wilson (RV, p. 163) ‘car’, and S *ratha*.

babhūyāt: ‘would have belonged to’ is based on Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) ‘jemandem (gen, dat) angehören, eigen sein’ in order to accommodate the dative pronoun *vaḥ*. Geldner (RV, p.482), Griffith (RV, p.232), Macdonell (RV, p.360), and Wilson (RV, p. 163) adopt the copula, while Renou (RV, p.71) the verb ‘aura’.

4c. *nāvagve áṅgīre dásagve*: the names of ancient ṛṣis of the Navagva, Angiras, and Daśagva clans respectively.

nāvagve: the element *náva-* ‘nine’ is perhaps a sound-play used in response to the question about the ancient (*sanáyaḥ*) or new (*návaḥ*) pathway, suggesting that a new one belongs to the Dawns.

4d. *saptásye*: Bṛhaspati is presumably meant here since he is described as such in RV 4.50.4cd: *saptásyas tujjātó ráveṇa / ví saptáraśmir adhamat támāṃsi* ‘Seven-mouthed, seven-tongued [Bṛhaspati] of powerful nature blew away darkness with a roar’. Differing somewhat, Geldner (RV, p.482), Wilson (RV, p. 163), and Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) based on S *saptacchandoyuktamukhe* interpret the word as an adjective describing all the clans.

5a. *rta-*: Elizarenkova and Witzel both propose an idiomatic translation of this ambiguous word of which no European equivalent encompasses the breadth of its variant, contextual meanings.^{xiii} In brief, the word expresses the sense of a cosmic law, the force of active truth, a principle of universal harmony, through to sacrifice on a ritualistic level.

5b. *bhúvanāni*: ‘creatures’, connected with *dvipāc catuṣpād* in *pāda* d, is translated similarly to Geldner (RV, p.482), Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.), and Renou (RV, p.71). Griffith (RV, p.232), Macdonell (RV, p.361), and Wilson (RV, p.163) render it as ‘worlds’, although according to Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.), this translation applies only in the specific instances, mostly in singular form in reference to one or the entire world, with the few plural usages occurring in later Books 9 and 10.

5d. *dvipāc catuṣpād*: ‘two-footed, four-footed’ is stylistically closer to the original Sanskrit than ‘biped, quadruped’ Geldner (RV, p.482), Macdonell (RV, p.361), and Renou (RV, p.71).

6a. *kvā*: *pāda* d seems to provide the answer to the question, ‘where’ is the ancient Dawn among those present, by stating they are not known apart, thus suggesting one Dawn cannot be singled out from her counterparts.

6b. Wilson (RV, p.163) similarly translates this *pāda* as ‘through whom the works of the R̥bhus were accomplished’; differing, Geldner (RV, p.482), Griffith (RV, p.232), Macdonell (RV, p.361) and Renou (RV, p.71) each introduce the gods as the implicit subject: ‘On which they [the gods] impose the tasks of the R̥bhus’ (Macdonell). The verse is understood to allude to a mythological reference at RV 1.161.2ab, where the gods, through the intermediary of Agni, instruct three mortal brothers, the R̥bhus, to make their single chalice into four (*ékaṃ camasāṃ catúraḥ kṛṇotana / tād vo devā abruvan*). By opting for this interpretation, *vidhānā* ‘tasks’ is read in the accusative rather than nominative case, whereas the treatment of the instrumental relative pronoun *yáyā* is particularly problematic because it is unclear why and how an ancient Dawn is involved in the divine imposition of the R̥bhus’ tasks.

Re-examining the key mythological hymn RV 1.161, however, provides a different context for interpretation. When asked to transform the one chalice into four, the R̥bhus reply to Agni by listing four objects that are to be made: a horse, car, milch-cow, and two youthful ones (*ásvaḥ kártvaḥ rátha utéhá kártvaḥ / dhenúḥ kártvā yuvaśā dvā*, RV 1.161.3bc). In v.5, the R̥bhus make other names for themselves when in the company of the gods, and then with these new names a virgin (*kanyā*, also girl and daughter) saves them (*spr-*: ‘schützen, retten’ Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.)). Who is the virgin and how does she save them? At RV 1.123.10a, the Dawn is likened to a virgin (*kanyā*), which draws an important correlation between the goddess and this attribute. Immediately after the virgin rescues the R̥bhus, three of the four objects previously listed suddenly manifest: *índro hárī yuyujé áśvínā rátham / bṛhaspátir viśvárūpām úpājata* ‘Indra has yoked the two steeds, the Áśvins [have] the car; Bṛhaspátir drove a dappled cow near’ (RV 1.161.6ab). In v.7, the text describes how an aging pair is made young again. Thus, Dawn appears to save the R̥bhus by aiding them in their creative process. Returning to the meaning of this particular verse (RV 4.51.6b), a more pertinent translation transpires whereby the four tasks of the R̥bhus emanate by the aide of an ancient Dawn (*kanyā*).

6c. *śúbham*: ‘to adorn themselves’ is based on Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.), ‘um sich zu schmücken’ who notes the infinitive sense of the word.

7a. *tāḥ ... tāḥ*: the double use of the pronoun is neither emphatic nor redundant as Geldner (RV, p.482), Griffith (RV, p.232), Macdonell (RV, p.361), and Wilson (RV, p.163) translate it. Interpreted similarly to Renou (RV, p.71), the first *tāḥ* anaphorically refers to the Dawns who move in the present at v.6cd,

while the second, read with *bhadrā uśāsaḥ purā*, has a demonstrative sense of ‘those’; the copula then renders the identification of the present and past Dawns.

bhadrāḥ: the attribute ‘beaming’ describes *raśmāyaḥ* ‘light rays’ at RV 4.52.5a, hinting at the equivalence of the plural Dawns and rays.

purā: S *pūrvam*.

7b. *abhiṣṭidyumnāḥ*: *abhiṣṭi-* ‘superior’ is based on Renou’s translation ‘prééminent’ and notes (RV, pp.71, 74), as well as Geldner’s translation ‘überwältigendem’ and his lengthy explanation of this difficult term (RV, pp.215–16, 482). The translation of *-dyumnāḥ* ‘shine’ resembles Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) and Geldner (RV, p.482) ‘Glanz’, and Renou (RV, p.71) ‘éclat’.

ṛtājātasatyāḥ: *ṛtā-* is translated as ‘order’ like Griffith (RV, p.232), Macdonell (RV, p.361), and Renou (RV, p.71), rather than ‘heiliges Werk Entsprössene’, Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) taken from S *yajña-*. The adverbial translation of *-satyāḥ* as ‘true’, based on Renou (RV, p.71) ‘véritablement’ and Geldner (RV, p.482) ‘rechtzeitig’, means that a *dvandva* compound is not interpreted between *ṛtājāta-* and *satyāḥ* as done by S ‘born on account of sacrifice and having the results of truth’, Geldner (RV, p.482) ‘die rechtzeitig geborenen und zuverlässigen’, and Macdonell (RV, p.361) ‘born in order, true to time’.

7c. *ījānāḥ śaśamānāḥ*: ‘having sacrificed, [having] toiled’ expresses the perfect participle quality, which no other translations do.

7d. *stuvān chāmsan*: ‘exalting, chanting’ likewise expresses the present participle quality, which no other translations do.

8b. *samānātaḥ*: ‘from the selfsame source’ is based on S *samānād deśād antarikṣāt*.

8c. *ṛtāsyā sādasaḥ*: ‘from the place of order’ draws from Gonda’s interpretation that ‘the Dawns have their origin in, or rather are based on or conditioned by, *ṛta*; what it says is that at the “place” where the Dawns awake *ṛta* makes its presence felt’;^{xiv} it differs from the idiomatic translation of *ṛta-* as ‘sacrifice’ suggested by S *ṛtasya yajñasya sadasaḥ sadaḥ*.

8d. *gāvām nā sārgāḥ*: this simile is more fully rendered ‘like the gushing forth (of a herd) of cows (from newly opened stables)’; S compares it to *udakānām sṛṣṭaya iva* and to *raśmayāḥ*. The same simile describes *raśmāyaḥ* ‘rays of light’ at RV 4.52.5b, indicating Vāmadeva’s attempt to show a correspondence between the Dawns and light rays.

jarante: ‘draw nearer’ is based on Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) ‘herbeikommen, sich nahen’, (MW, s.v.) ‘to come near, approach’, Griffith (RV., p.232) ‘come nigh’; differing from Geldner (RV., p.482) ‘erwacht’ and Renou (RV, p.71) ‘s’éveilleint’.

9a. *tā īn nṃ evā*: ‘just now those ones’ draws from Graßmann’s comment ‘wo id nur das evā verstärkt’ (W. RV, §302); differently, Geldner ‘noch immer dieselben’^{xv} and Macdonell (RV, p.361) ‘The same even now’ translate *tā id* in the sense of ‘the same’.

samānīḥ: ‘combined’ is based on Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) ‘vereint’; Geldner (RV, p.483) ‘in gleicher Weise’, Macdonell (RV, p.361) ‘in the selfsame way’, and Renou (RV, p.71) ‘de la meme manière’ employ a rather different translation, perhaps taken from S *ekarūpā*.

9b. *āmīta-*: ‘undiminished’ is translated the same as Macdonell (RV, p.361) and Griffith (RV, p.233); the word derives from the past passive participle of *mī-* ‘mindern, aufheben; ... verändern’ BōWb (s.v.). In regards to the phenomenon of dawn, where the ever-changing sky grows vastly in luminosity and colour, the hue qualified by *āmīta-* is more accurately ‘not lessened or diminished’, rather than ‘unveränderter’ Geldner (RV, p.483) and Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.), or ‘inaltérable’, Renou (RV, p.71).

9c. *ābhvam*: ‘non-being, nothingness, void’ seem apt translations considering the word’s derivation from *bhū-* ‘to be’. Despite giving a translation of ‘Unheimlichkeit, Grauen’, Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) comments that *ābhva* is ‘nicht seiende’; with a translation of ‘l’informité’, Renou (RV, pp. 36, 71) notes that *ābhū* at RV 10.129.3 has the sense of nothingness or a void, and cites Neisser’s observation that ‘Unding’ and ‘Unwesen’ characterise darkness.

āsitaṃ: S *kṛṣṇaṃ rūpam*.

9cd. *rúśadbhiḥ ... tānūbhiḥ*: masculine *rúśadbhiḥ* and feminine *tānūbhiḥ* are read together similarly to Renou (RV, p.71), Griffith (RV, p.233), and S even though the words are grammatically incompatible; Geldner (RV, p.483) and Macdonell (RV, p.361) take the words separately, supplying to the attribute *rúśadbhiḥ* the nouns ‘Farben’ and ‘hues’ respectively.

10c. *syonāt*: Geldner (RV, p.483) questions whether *syonā-* refers to *barhís-* ‘sacrificial *kuśa* grass’ (RV 10.110.4, 8) or *sádas-* ‘sacrificial seat’ (according to his translation of v.8c); Renou (RV, p.75) notes ‘ici le sens de *yóni* est latent’. Is *syonā-*, however, the couch of the worshippers or the Dawns? For Geldner (RV, p.483), Griffith (RV, p.233), and Macdonell (RV, p.361) it is the worshippers’, whereas for Renou (RV, p.72) it seems to be the Dawns’.

vah: S *yusmān*.

11a. *tát*: the neuter demonstrative pronoun refers to the neuter noun *suvīrya-* ‘heroic troop’, not to masculine *rayí-* ‘wealth’.

11b. *yajñáketuḥ*: the analysis of this compound draws from RV 1.113.19, where Dawn is described as *yajñásya ketúḥ* ‘the banner of sacrifice’; for an extensive discussion on the word, see Oldenberg^{xvi}.

TRANSLATION OF RV 4.52

(Gāyatrī Metre, 3 x 8 syllables)

1. That well-known, vitally young maid,
Shining away from [her] sister,
Daughter of the sky has appeared.

2. Like a mare, vivid [and] reddish,
Harmonious mother of cows,
Dawn has become the Aśvins’ friend.

3. Both friend you are of the Aśvins
And a mother of cows you are;
Also Dawn, wealth have you possessed.

4, Driving adversaries away
With care, O one of youthful verve,
You we have roused with praising hymns.

5. The beaming light rays have appeared,
Like the gushing forth of the cows—
Dawn has suffused the wide expanse.

6. [Through] suffusing [it], O bright one,
You have unveiled darkness with light.
O Dawn, strengthen [your] own nature!

7. The sky you illumine with light rays;
You illumine [your] dear, wide airspace,
O Dawn, with a light-coloured glow.

NOTES TO RV 4.52

1a. *syá*: cf. RV 4.51.1ab *tyát ... jyótis*, while observing the potential equivalence of ‘that well-known light’ and ‘that well-known maid [Dawn]’; see also notes at RV 4.51.1a.

sūnārī: ‘vitally-young’ follows Gonda (Epi., p.99) who discusses the aspect of youthful vigour inherent in the word.

1b. cf. RV 1.124.8a, where Rātrī (Night) empties her womb for her superior sister (Uṣas); and RV 10.127.3.

pāri: ‘apart from’ the indeclinable is translated emphatically with the ablative *svásuḥ* to highlight the distinction between the sisters Uṣas and Rātī; it is not read as a second prefix to *vyucchāntī* as maintained by Graßmann (W. RV, §1231).

2a. cf. RV 1.30.21c *ásve ná citre aruṣi* and 10.75.7d *áśvā ná citrá*; thus, *citrā* and *aruṣi* are both included with *áśvī* in the simile.

citrā: cf. RV 4.51.2a where the attribute describes plural Dawns.

2b. *ṛtāvarī*: literally ‘possessing *ṛtā*’; the translation ‘harmonious’ is taken in the sense of Dawn possessing the principle of harmony that governs the three Vedic worlds. Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) ‘heilig’ and Renou (RV, p.76) ‘gardienne de l’Ordre’ differ somewhat; an idiomatic translation (see notes at RV 4.51.5a) is chosen by Geldner (RV, p.483) ‘zeitige’ and Macdonell (RV, p.362) ‘timely’.

3a. this *pāda* reiterates v.2c, except here the aorist from *bhū-* replaces the present tense verb from *as-*. An immediate transition in the relationship of Dawn and the Aśvins becomes evident during the poet’s chanting, perhaps reflecting a change in the morning sky.

4a. *yāvayāddveṣasam*: the epithet, ‘driving adversaries away’, indicates Dawn’s enemies precede her, probably corresponding as Griffith (RV, p.233) suggests to the nocturnal darkness or evil spirits of night; cf. RV 1.113.12a.

4b. *cikivīt*: this is the sole example of this adverb, which derives from the perfect participle *cikivāt* of *cit-* ‘to know, observe, be attentive; to care for’ MW (s.v.) with the atypical suffix *-it* added; for further analysis of the word, see Renou (RV, p.77). Renou, along with Geldner (RV, p.483), Griffith (RV, p.233), and Macdonell (RV, p.362), reads the adverb with the main verb in the sense of ‘à la pensée vigilante’; however, given the adverb’s syntactical proximity to *yāvayāddveṣasam*, an epithet of verbal quality, the above translation instead interprets them together.

sūnṛtāvari: ‘O one of youthful verve’ borrows from Gonda (Epi., pp.98-99) and his discussion on the necessity of youthful vigour to dispel darkness and bestow treasures.

4c. *prāti abhutsmaḥi*: The verb *prāti+budh-*, employed here as an aorist and at RV 4.51.10c as a present participle, relates to the worshippers arousing the Dawn, whereas with the verbs *budh-* and *prā+budh-*, the Dawn herself wakes others.

5a. *prāti ... adr̥ṣata*: a word-play occurs between this middle aorist and the passive aorist *prāti ... adar̥ṣi* in v.1ac, both derived from the verbal root from *prāti+dr̥ṣ-*; we see from this repeated verb that first the Dawn appears, followed by light rays. See also notes at RV 4.51.1–2 where verbs from the root *sthā-* and the indeclinable *purástāt* recur, linked by the particle *u*.

bhadrāḥ: the attribute qualifying *raśmāyaḥ* here and the Dawns at RV 4.51.7a illustrates a potential equivalence between the light rays and Dawns.

5b. *gāvāṃ sargāḥ ná*: the simile also qualifies the Dawns, see notes at RV 4.51.8d.

5c. *jrāyaḥ*: ‘expanse’, see Renou (RV, p.77) for a discussion.

6a. *āpaprūṣī*: as Dawn has unveiled darkness *by means of* suffusing the wide expanse, the perfect participle here adopts a present sense, rather than a past one; Wackernagel states that this is occasionally possible.^{xvii}

6b. *jyōtiṣā tāmaḥ*: see notes at RV 4.51.1b.

6c. *ānu svadhām ava*: is *ānu* a separable indeclinable read with the accusative noun *svadhām* or prefix to the verb *ava*? It is rendered an indeclinable by Geldner (RV, p.483) ‘sei nach eigenem Ermessen gnädig’, Griffith (RV, p.232) ‘after thy nature aid us’, Macdonell (RV, p.362) ‘aid (us) by thine own sweet will’, and Renou (RV, p.76) ‘favorise-(nous) selon ta loi proper’. Graßmann (W. RV, s.v.) differs by treating it as prefix, thus translating *anu+av-* as ‘erleben, auffrischen’ in the sense of ‘strengthen (your) own nature’. Elsewhere in this hymn, the worshippers do not ask Dawn for anything, so it seems unlikely that this second-last verse contains the worshipper’s sole request for favour.

7b. *priyām*: The interpolation ‘your’ intends to convey the personal, affectionate aspect of *priyā-* ‘dear’ describing the wide airspace, which is the very realm inhabited by the goddess.

7c. *śukrēṇa śociṣā*: these frequently conjoined words form an alliteration, as repeatedly occurs with *uśās-* and the verbal root *vas-*; cf. RV 1.48.14d.

CONCLUSIONS

While scholarly translators of ancient poetry tend to disregard the literary style of the source text in favour of the comprehensibility of prose, the above poetic translations of RV 4.51–52 intend to show that such a literary sacrifice is not entirely justified. With each *pāda* maintaining the correct number of syllables according to the corresponding Vedic metre, these literal translations have hopefully remained lucid. This particular approach to translating poetry promotes verbal accuracy, maintains more of the original syntax than prose, and expresses the concise symmetry of the source text. Understandably, a method operating within the confines of a prescribed syllable-count does occasionally impede upon the fluency of the poetic rendition. Overall, however, this manner of translating has the potential to convey a clear, articulate interpretation true to the original style, while still possessing the linguistic accuracy and readability necessary for the rigors of modern scholarship.

The above textual and exegetical criticism has raised several key points relating to the unusual occurrence of the plural and singular Dawns. The plural hymn (RV 4.51) illustrates the intrinsic nature of the many Dawns well, emphasising their togetherness and indistinguishability as one Dawn can never be seen in isolation from her counterparts (v.6d). The Dawns arise together from a common origin in the east (v.8ab), and move with an undiminished colour (v.9ab), augmenting in hue and luminosity as the morning progresses. Only in the plural hymn do words associated with time occur; the eight such words are *adyā*, *nu*, *nūnām*, *purā*, *purāṇī*, *svit*. All except one of these instances relate to the plural Dawns, six of which concern the present time, suggesting the poet’s intention to accentuate the immediate existence of many goddesses. By comparison, the singular hymn (RV 4.52) affords far less description of the one Dawn. The most apparent function is her distribution of luminosity: suffusing the wide expanse, presumably with light rays (v.5); unveiling darkness with light (v.6b); and, illuminating the sky with light rays and the airspace with a glow (v.7).

Vāmadeva’s strategically positioned vocabulary in both hymns can serve as a means to indicate the distinct identities of the one and many Dawns. For example, the attribute *bhadrā-* ‘beaming’ describes the Dawns in RV 4.51.7a and *raśmāyaḥ* ‘light rays’ in RV 4.52.5ab, and in the same manner, the simile *gāvām ná sārgāḥ* ‘like the gushing forth of cows’ refers to the Dawns in RV 4.51.8d and light rays in RV 4.52.5ab. The vocabulary employed here by Vāmadeva highlights a correspondence between the plural Dawns and light rays. Another example relating instead to the singular Dawn utilises the demonstrative pronoun *tyā-* ‘that well-known one’, which refers in RV 4.51.1ab to the singular *jyōtis-* ‘light’ and then to an attribute of Dawn, *jānī-* ‘maid’, in RV 4.52.1a. The prominent position of the pronoun *tyā-* in the opening *pāda* of both hymns reinforces the possible equivalence of the singular light and Dawn.

Another stylistic feature, where the first verb in each hymn is repeated, confirms the notion that the singular Dawn corresponds to light and the plural to rays of light. The aorist from the root *sthā-* ‘to arise’ and the indeclinable *purāstāt* ‘eastward’ recur in RV 4.51, with the two verses linked by the conjunctive particle *u*. The connotation is that first the well-known light arises in the east (v.1ab), followed by the vivid Dawns (v.2a). Similarly, the aorist from the root *prāti+drś-* ‘to appear’ repeats in RV 4.52, illustrating that first a single Dawn appears (v.1ac), followed by many light rays afterwards (v.5ab). Studying in parallel these two deliberate repetitions of main verbs, it transpires that first the single light/Dawn emerges, and subsequently the plural Dawns/light rays.

From this small sample of just two *Ṛgvedic* hymns, I tentatively propose that the plural Dawns correspond to the rays of light. The identity of the singular Dawn is less apparent as textual descriptions describe her using different luminous entities instrumentally, while the repetitions of the pronoun *tyā-* and two main verbs point to the equivalence of Dawn and light. Resolving these two aspects, we may conclude that the singular Dawn comprises of the light she disperses. The key ideas emerging from the close study of RV 4.51–52 nonetheless highlight the need for more exhaustive research into the enigma of singular and plural Dawns within a wider *Ṛgvedic* context.

REFERENCES

- ⁱ Well-known examples of ancient poetry translated as prose include Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in Greek; the *Ṛgveda* and *Bhagavad Gītā* in Sanskrit; and the *Dhammapada*, *Theragatha*, and *Therīgatha* in Pāli.
- ⁱⁱ The 1028 hymns of the *Ṛgveda* are the earliest-known, comprehensive text of the Indo-European corpus, and form archaic strand upon which later Hinduism is founded. Although its absolute and relative chronology is problematic and widely disputed, Witzel, based on the previous work of Oldenberg, has given a date of 1700–1200 B.C.E to the text (Michael Witzel, "Substrate Languages in Old Indo-Aryan (Rgvedic, Middle and Late Vedic)", *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies (EJVS)*, vol. 5, issue 1 (Sept. 1999), 3.).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Arthur Anthony Macdonell, trans., *Hymns from the Rigveda, Heritage of India Series* (Calcutta: Association Press, n.d.)
- ^{iv} Arthur Anthony Macdonell, trans., "The Uṣas Hymns of the Ṛgveda", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1932): 345–371.
- ^v John Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts on the Origin and History of the People of India, Their Religion and Institutions*, 2d ed., vol. 5 (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1967), 181.
- ^{vi} Agni, Sūrya, and Soma are examples of typically singular deities sometimes found in plural form.
- ^{vii} The most noteworthy word-play effect in RV 4.51–52 concerns the repetition of vocabulary, repeated either in both hymns or within the same one.
- ^{viii} Jacob Wackernagel, *Altindische Grammatik*, 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896–1964), 3:549.
- ^{ix} J. Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, Disputationes Rheno-Trajectinae, VIII. (The Hague: Mouton, 1963), 137–38.
- ^x Arthur Anthony Macdonell, *A Vedic Grammar for Students* (1916; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993), 353–54.
- ^{xi} Macdonell, *A Vedic Grammar for Students*, 221.
- ^{xii} *Oxford English Dictionary CD*, ed. R.W. Burchfield, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), s.v.
- ^{xiii} Tatyana. J. Elizarenkova, *Language and Style of the Vedic Rsis*, Suny Series in Hindu Studies, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 30; M. Witzel, "How to Enter the Vedic Mind? Strategies in Translating a Brahmana Text" (1996; available from <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/%7Ewitzel/How-to-Enter.pdf>), 11–12.
- ^{xiv} Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, 182.
- ^{xv} Karl Friedrich Geldner, *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1907–1909), 79.
- ^{xvi} Hermann Oldenberg, *Ṛgveda: Textkritische und exegetische Noten*, vol. 1, (1909–1912; reprint, Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1970), 306.
- ^{xvii} Wackernagel, *Altindische Grammatik*, 2.2: 914.